

## Why the ICA Should Not Expel Russia. A Dissenting Voice on the Ukraine, American Policy and the Future of European Social Democracy

### An Opinion Piece

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The principles of Co-operation surely teach that the search for the common good, driven by the principle of solidarity (the desire to reach a mutually acceptable agreement in the context of conflicting interests), needs to underpin international relations. Thus there can be no security for any one country or block of countries in Europe that does not guarantee all countries security East and West. Russian security concerns are real and historically justified and the Western European nations surely can appreciate this. No one country can insist on alliances that threaten the security of all the other countries of Europe. I refer here of course to Ukraine. That Russia would not let NATO advance further right up to its own borders was going to be Putin's inevitable response to the posturing of Ukrainian politicians encouraged by a huge influx of western arms long before hostilities commenced. This is the Cuban missile crisis in reverse. I heard one BBC correspondent today suggest that Putin might be regretting his decision to invade. But if anyone knows Russian history and, indeed, Putin's personal history they may draw the conclusion that he would have felt there was no other choice.

Let us view history for a moment from Russia's perspective. When the Nazis were threatening to invade Czechoslovakia, the Russians offered a joint treaty with the West to defend the Czechs. This approach was turned down and the western powers allowed the invasion unopposed. The Gestapo's record of atrocities against the Czech people is well documented. The Russians subsequently signed a peace treaty with the Nazi state but then so did the British. The Nazis tore up the British agreement first and we declared war. When the German Army was in the Channel Islands, and our cities bombed day and night, and most of the rest of Europe under Nazi occupation, the American Congress remained neutral. Then Hitler invaded Russia who lost 20 + million dead in the struggle to defeat the Fascist forces. The suffering of the Russian people at that time is hard to contemplate.

My Dad was an able seaman on the convoys that supplied our Russian allies and as a post war child I remember playing in the air raid shelter, by then turned into a potting shed at the bottom of the garden. Does anyone in Europe East or West really want another war? Yet the media's one sided hysteria currently vilifying the Russians is talking us into this abyss. I do think the demonizing rhetoric may be toning down a bit but if we are not careful a war in Europe by design or accident is on the cards. All the countries in Europe had Nazi sympathizers before and during the Second World War. Today Ukraine's fascist party is reputedly the biggest in Europe, so Putin is not entirely wrong to be concerned about the growth of the extreme right on Russia's border. This is particularly so when armed by western lethal aid, as it is termed. This is the same lethal aid the West supplied to the Taliban to defeat the pro Soviet regime in Afghanistan.

Another bit of recent history, which the Russians will remember and colours Putin's experience growing up, is that their then President Gorbachev unilaterally withdrew Russian forces from Eastern Europe and called for a peace

agreement for mutual security in Europe. The NATO response was to advance towards Russia and re-militarize the former Warsaw Pact nations within NATO. The humiliated Gorbachev fell from power to be replaced by the pro-western President Yeltsin - a drunk and a crook who, with the West's blessing and to the City of London's great profit, created the Russian oligarchs who then left the Russian people, having stolen their birthright, to starve. It took Putin and the KGB to re-establish some semblance of order in Russia post Yeltsin. In many ways, Putin is the creation of the West.

Since then, under President Obama with Hilary Clinton as Secretary of State, the US further escalated the arms race in Europe, deploying tactical nuclear weapons along NATO's frontline pointing at Russia. Now there is a threat that NATO wants to advance right up to Russia's border – this crazy and delusional project moved out of fictional entertainment and became policy when Ukraine's TV star turned populist leader became elected President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. The West refused to negotiate on the issue of NATO membership and instead continued to send in billions of dollars' worth of lethal aid to the Ukrainians, who armed their civilian population for war which, without negotiation and western concessions to Russia, was inevitable. America has succeeded in applying huge sanctions on Russia for this. This policy has been damaging for the whole European economy and its peoples not just Russia.

Europeans outside of Russia should pause to reflect on the double standards and apparent paradoxes in US foreign policy. President Putin is castigated as an invader and war criminal and as operating a phoney democracy but it's not Russia but China that invaded and annexed an entire country, Tibet, and continues to commit huge human rights abuses in the process. The last I looked there were opposition parties in Russia whilst there are none in China and the democracy movement in Hong Kong is being ruthlessly suppressed. There is also evidence of mass persecution of the Muslim minority community. But no sanctions are being called for against China.

Instead, President Biden has facilitated America's third proxy war with Russia, wrecking the European Economy in the process. But he does nothing about China and has abandoned the defence of freedom in Afghanistan as being too expensive whilst seeking to borrow a further \$31 billion to prolong the slaughter in Ukraine. If the Russians did win total victory, I think girls and boys would still get equal access to education in Ukraine. What is at stake is not individual rights but Russian security and the peace and economic development of the whole of Europe. A neutral Ukraine without being flooded with US arms even minus some of its Russian speaking territories will not reduce human rights in the region or represent a security threat to the states within NATO or the European Union (EU). Russia and the EU need a trade deal not a trade war. Part of the deal, including some acceptance of Russian claims on land in Ukraine, should include EU membership for Ukraine but guarantee Ukrainian neutrality.

None of this would be viewed as good from the US perspective. But the American people need to reflect whether, with China rearming at such a fast rate, and with a regime far more totalitarian than Russia, this is the time to weaken Europe and push Russia towards China? In Europe, looking from a perspective of comparative politics, European politicians, from one nation conservatives to right, centre and left Social and Christian Democrats, need to ask themselves, what is the game the American political elite is playing? Can we be serious in being so concerned about Putin and the Russian oligarchs and his so called cronies on one of our borders while being blind to the fact that no person in the USA has a chance of becoming President without the backing of the American billionaire class and that one in four American are directly or indirectly connected to the arms industry (instead of with a public health service or a real social security system)? American capitalism operates on a Libertarian model not a Social Democratic one and the latter is a major competitor and alternative political model to the USA.

Europe is far from perfect but it leads the way in human rights, climate change reforms and social mobility and social justice. It is also a major competitor to China and the United States on the global market. European politicians need to reflect that threats to European security, economy, social democracy and human rights standards have more than one front to consider. It seems Billionaires in China and America are entrepreneurs not oligarchs according to our media. But all billionaires are oligarchs if given the chance and Platform Capitalism has enabled them to get that chance. Climate change to Elon Musk, net worth around \$276B, is a business opportunity not a threat and the Ukraine war takes our attention away from the failure of Congress to pass the measures Biden promised on climate change.

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As for the alleged Russian war crimes, let us remember that in any modern war more civilians die than soldiers. If there are armed groups fighting inside civilian locations, there will be civilian casualties and, regrettably, war crimes against civilian populations. Was it any different for the British Army fighting in Kenya or Malaya or Ireland, or the Israelis fighting Hezbollah or the PLO? Have our media pundits forgotten what the Americans did in Vietnam? Not only did they inflict cruel anti-personnel weapons, they also used chemical weapons in their war against a democratically elected North Vietnam whilst refusing free elections in the South on the ground the Communists would win. Was the British firebombing of Dresden in the closing months of the Second World War justified on military grounds? Did the shortening of the war with Japan justify the A-bombs on two populous cities, both non-military targets? It is not just Putin who has blood on their hands.

We must reopen talks with Russia for a genuine security for all and it's up to the European members in NATO and for those European states in the EU to start by making it clear NATO will not advance further towards Russia or provide arms to Ukraine and that the EU wants positive economic relations with the Russians and peace not war and sanctions. *This is in everybody's interest, particularly right now for the people of Ukraine, as the last thing they need is for this American-Russian proxy war in their country to continue.* A genuine attempt at peace talks by European leaders could provide Russia with a way out that achieves its main strategic objectives in the area of security and lays the ground for the peaceful development of Russia and the reconstruction of Ukraine with the prospects of incremental improvements in Russia's flawed but at least existent democratic processes. There is no chance of such changes in China, which is a one-party state, but America seems to ignore this in its anti-Putin rhetoric.

If things continue, the UK Brexit attack on European Social Democracy funded by American money will be able to develop. The prospect of German rearmament and rising discontent amongst the poorest classes across European nations as a result of the economic consequences of this war will further enable populist leaders to undermine European unity. Brexit shows the threat is real. Some commentators are claiming the war demonstrates how much better off we are under American leadership. Tell that to the starving Afghans or to the Kurds fighting in Syria only to be dumped by the Americans. Tell it to the democratic electors in Chile who saw their leader murdered in a military coup and his followers rounded up and gunned down in a football stadium. Tell it to the Vietnamese. No calls about war crimes or crimes against humanity by either America or the UK governments then. The EU cannot let itself be bounced by America's puppet Zelenskyy into increased prolonged hostilities. Concessions to Russia on security and land, non lethal reconstruction aid to Ukraine and a trade deal for both is the only serious policy to save European Social Democracy.

Sadly, the postures on Ukraine by the current Labour Party leadership in the UK and European Social Democratic parties, including the German Greens, demonstrate they have less regard for Social Democracy and peace than they have for gaining office. Roberto Michelle's *Political Parties*, a study of the pro war stance of the 1st World War German Social Democratic Party, is instructive here. This is why principled leadership and a call by the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) for peace talks is important. The right will say we are seeking to reward Russian aggression but what such a call is really about is ensuring a wider war is avoided. Social Democratic Europe can continue with the chance to help Russia move on and develop its governance and civil society institutions given a sustainable economic partnership with Europe. It seems whilst pointing the finger of judgement at Putin and continuing the flow of arms, Russia gets weakened (with consequences that are not predictable), Europe's and the world's poor grow poorer whilst America continues to profit. It's not American civilians who are sacrificing lives and seeing disruption for future generations forced into exile as we see continuing in Syria and Afghanistan and now in Ukraine.

Peace not war in Europe. We need to offer Russia more than just threats and sanctions. Let me conclude with the words of Ariel Guarco, President of the International Cooperative Alliance.

*Advocating for the immediate cessation of violence in Ukraine, we continue to call on governments, international organizations, and civil society organizations in general to build a positive global agenda for peace based on cooperation. Imposition by force will never be the way.*

*In the spirit of the ICA Declaration on Positive Peace through Co-operatives, we reaffirm that*

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*conflicts arise from unmet human needs and aspirations. The ultimate goal for cooperatives is the satisfaction of basic human needs and aspirations. Cooperatives act for a better, more inclusive, more sustainable, more participative, and more prosperous future for all.*